



## Afghanistan Engineer District North



July 8, 2010

### Col. Thomas Magness takes command of Corps of Engineers in Kabul

By Paul Giblin



Brig. Gen. William Buckler passes flag to Col. Thomas H. Magness IV, symbolizing the transfer of responsibility.

KABUL, Afghanistan – Col. Thomas H. Magness IV took command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' district in Kabul on July 8, becoming the district's ninth leader since the district was established in 2004.

Magness, who previously headed the Los Angeles District, succeeds Col. Michael

McCormick, who commanded Afghanistan Engineer District-North since July 9, 2009, a period of rapid growth in scope and mission for the district.

"I cannot tell you what an honor it is to take command of this outstanding unit today," Magness told about 300 Corps of Engineers employees and guests during a



Birdseye view of the change of command ceremony.

Change of Command ceremony at the Qalaa House compound in downtown Kabul. "The greatest privilege we give Army officers today is command. And there is no greater assignment than command in a wartime theater."

He credited McCormick for assembling a strong team, and establishing sound policies and conditions that position the unit for success.

The district is comprised of 627 military personnel and civilians stationed in Kabul and across eastern and northern Afghanistan. The unit's primary mission is to bolster Afghanistan's infrastructure system after three decades of conflict, building army bases, police stations, roads, airstrips and other facilities.

Brig. Gen. William Buckler awarded McCormick the Bronze Star Medal for exceptional meritorious achievement while serving as commander of the district. During a speech that followed, Buckler recog-

nized McCormick for selfless and tenacious service.

He noted that McCormick guided the district as its manpower swelled from approximately 450 to more than 600, doubling the size of some branches. Buckler emphasized that the growth came during a time when the original Afghanistan Engineer District split into two separate divisions – Afghanistan Engineer District-North, which retained the original headquarters at Qalaa House in Kabul, and Afghanistan Engineer District-South, was established at Kandahar Airfield in Kandahar.

North district personnel provided critical support to help the South district get started, Buckler said.

"That selfless service, that selfless attitude that all of you embody, starts with Col. McCormick's leadership," Buckler said. "You think that happened by accident? No. By the result of tremendous effort and





Col. Thomas H. Magness congratulating Col. Michael McCormick's exit speech.

work. And Col. McCormick embodies the type of ethic required to do that."

The brigadier general also recalled the colonel's unwavering dedication to his assignment. He said he'd lost count of the number of times McCormick called him late at night.

"I'd pick up the phone and it would be Col. McCormick going, 'Sir, you may hear about this and I just wanted you to know that ... ' and fill in the blank about whose toes he'd stepped on, or whose shins he'd kicked, or whose sensibilities he may have put aside to accomplish a mission," Buckler said.

The mission will go uninterrupted, Buckler said, because Magness' experience, and in particular his tour as commander of the Los Angeles District for three years, will serve him well as he takes over. "It certainly demonstrates the Army's capability to pick qualified commanders to lead organizations like this in a combat environment," he said.

McCormick used the change of command

to thank personnel within the Corps of Engineers, other U.S. agencies, Afghan ministries and contracting companies who had served either alongside him or under him during his command. "The last 12 months have mostly flown by, and I must say that I've very much enjoyed working with all you," he told those assembled.

He thanked people many by name, including personnel whose tours in Afghanistan had ended weeks or months earlier, and those whose tours in country extend weeks or months beyond his own.

The focus of his command, McCormick said, was the important work of rebuilding Afghanistan by delivering infrastructure projects that benefit Afghan security forces and Afghan residents. "I found these objectives are much easier said than done, particularly in such a complex operating environment," he said.

The work was extraordinarily difficult, though the Corps of Engineers team achieved many significant objectives, he said. Among them:

- Progress toward an Afghan national police training center in Wardak Province.
- Development of more than 75 Afghan national army and police facilities across the country.
- New standard designs for the buildings that cut costs and construction times.
- A program that provides armed military escorts for Corps of Engineers personnel in the field.
- A procedure that closely monitors contractors' construction schedules.
- A program that allows the Corps of Engineers to hire Afghan nationals.
- Partnerships with various Afghan government agencies, business organizations and trade schools.
- Initiatives to develop and hire small Afghan business.
- And policies to fight corruption and force contractors to pay their employees and suppliers promptly.

"Successes in these programs, projects and initiatives and many others like them are directly attributed to the many dedicated AED employees and the teamwork displayed by the U.S., coalition and Afghan partners, and the design and construction contractors," the outgoing commander said.

Under sunny skies outside the namesake Qalaa House building, McCormick and Magness followed longstanding Army tradition as they passed the unit's red-and-white flag to represent the transfer of authority from one commander to another. First, Command Sgt. Mjr. Calvin T. Williams, the senior enlisted Soldier in the unit, passed the flag to McCormick, symbolizing his last act of allegiance to the outgoing commander. Then McCormick passed the flag that bears the Corps of Engineers' castle logo to Buckler, signifying that the unit is never without senior leadership.

Next, Buckler passed it to Magness, symbolizing the transfer of responsibility for the unit and its members to the incoming commander. Finally, Magness completed the rite by passing the flag back to Williams, showing his confidence in the senior enlisted Soldier, and allowing Williams to demonstrate his first act of allegiance to him.

The Army 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division Screaming Eagles Band opened the ceremony playing the U.S. and Afghan national anthems. Civilian vocalist Shawn Washington, an equal employment opportunity assistant for the district, joined the band in performing the "Star-Spangled Banner."

Chaplain Martin Booth gave the invocation. The guests included Maj. Gens. William Grisoli and Timothy McHale; Jim Bersson, the director of the Joint Program Integration Office; and Naeem Yassin, the president of the Afghanistan Builders Association, among others.

The band concluded the event with "Essayons," "The Army Song" and other selections, including "Gonna Fly Now," the theme song to the movie "Rocky."

Afterward, McCormick said his final farewells to employees and guests inside the Qalaa House building, before departing for his next assignment in Seattle, where he will coordinate defense support for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Meanwhile, Magness greeted employees and guests in the not-quite-completed new dining facility at Qalaa House, videotaped an introduction to district employees in outlying posts, meet with groups of employees, and represented the Corps of Engineers that evening at a media event at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.